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# MAHATAMA GANDHI'S VIEWS ON HEALTH

*VISHAL GUPTA* AND DR. VANDANA VERMA***

India spends 4.10 per cent of its GDP on health as per XII Five Year Plan. Diseases belong to lifestyle are emerging as India's major health hazard resulting from bad food habits, physical inactivity, wrong dietary pattern and distorted biological clock. A joint report of World Economic Forum and W.H.O. reveals that India has suffered an accumulated loss of $236.6 billion by 2015 on account of unhealthy lifestyles and faulty diet. On his 150th birth anniversary on October 2nd 2019 it will be very remarkable respect to Bapu if we review his ideas regarding health issues which are very relevant in current scenario of health and disease. Gandhi ji has given insight about all the dimensions of health like opting the path of Satya and Ahimsa, Yama and Niyam is helpful for social and mental health, living with nature, intake of vegetarian diet, milk, praying for Nature and God is helpful for physical and spiritual health.

## 1. About Our Body

Very fewer people know that Gandhi's book on "Keys to Health" is one of the most popular creations in all of his writings which throw fire on significance of his ideas on health. Gandhi ji used to say "It is Health that is real Wealth and not pieces of gold and silver"[1] Gandhi says that it is necessary to obligate knowledge about one's body which most of them are ignorant about. He argues that human body is composed of five elements which have been described well in Indian system of medicine i.e. Ayurveda as Earth (Prithavi), Water (Jala), Sky (Aakash), Fire (Agni) and Air(Vayu). He further states that good working of the human body depends upon the harmonious activity of the various component parts. The first element Air without which we can't live is surrounded us on all sides and the second element Water is basic necessity of life. The third element Earth which can be used as nature's way to treat ailments i.e., mud poultices to cue scorpion sting, constipation ordinary boils etc. The other element fire which we get from sun has many uses such as sunbaths. The last Sky which can be also termed as Aakash, helps to maintain and regain health. These five basic elements known in Ayurveda as ***Panchmahabhuta,*** constitutes our body. Gandhi Ji asks what is the use of the human body? Gandhi replies to it that, "everything in the world can be used and abused and it applies to our body too. We abuse it when we use it for selfish purposes, in order to harm our body. It is put to right use if we exercise self-restraint and dedicate ourselves to the service of the whole world."[2] Moving ahead let us consider how often and how much to eat? Here Gandhi replies, "Food should be taken as a matter of duty even as a medicine to sustain the body, never for the satisfaction of palate. There should be self-control as such habits of elders, influence children to some extent."[3]

## 2. About Cleanliness

Although every religion underlines the importance of cleanliness and Gandhi stated that Indians should follow the western countries regarding cleanliness. Further Gandhi focused on sanitation in camps. Though it is difficult to maintain but Gandhi has offered various solutions in his book "Social Service, Work and Reform Vol-1",Bapu suggests that one of the best solution offered by him was every person should become bhangi i.e. sweeper to maintain cleanliness and this was practiced by Gandhi himself. The concept of 'Sanitation' is a comprehensive one including effective management (collection, treatment and disposal/recovery, reuse or recycling) of human waste, solid waste (including biodegradable and non-biodegradable refuse/trash/rubbish), waste water, sewage effluents, industrial wastes, and hazardous (such as hospital, chemical, radioactive, plastic or other dangerous) wastes.

The standards of sanitation in a society are closely inter-related to the levels of hygiene and public health in it and, hence, to the attainable standards of longevity and extent of diseases, and thus to the productive levels of the society. These also determine the levels of avoidable wastages of available resources and to what extent the so-called wastes are being recycled as valuable resources. Due to lack of sanitation facility, which includes lack of cleanliness

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